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ABSTRACT

This lesson introduces students to the writing, art, and religious beliefs of ancient Egypt through hieroglyphs, one of the oldest writing systems in the world, and through tomb paintings. Hieroglyphs consist of pictures of familiar objects that represent sounds and were used in ancient Egypt from about 3100 BC to 400 CE. In the first part of the lesson, the class creates a pictorial alphabet of its own and then learns and uses the symbols of the Egyptian hieroglyphic alphabet. In the second part of the lesson, students identify and represent in their own drawings figures from the Book of the Dead, a funereal text written on papyrus and carved on the walls of tombs to help guide the deceased through the afterlife. The lesson: provides an introduction; poses guiding questions; cites subject areas, time required, and skills developed; outlines in detail the two suggested activities for classroom implementation (Decipher the Hieroglyphs; and Make an Egyptian Painting); suggests additional activities for extending the lesson; lists selected Websites; and addresses standards alignment. (NKA)

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Egyptian Symbols and Figures Hieroglyphs [and] Scroll Paintings [Lesson Plan]

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Egyptian Symbols and Figures: Hieroglyphs

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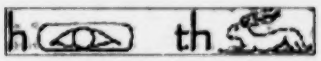
GRADES K-2



A message in hieroglyphs. Public Broadcasting Service

Introduction

This lesson introduces students to the writing, art, and religious beliefs of ancient Egypt through hieroglyphs, one of the oldest writing systems in the world, and through tomb paintings. Hieroglyphs consist of pictures of familiar objects that represent sounds. They were used in ancient Egypt from about 3100 BC to 400 CE.

In the first part of this lesson, the class creates a pictorial alphabet of its own and then learns and uses the symbols of the Egyptian hieroglyphic alphabet. In the second part of the lesson, students identify and represent in their own drawings figures from the Book of the Dead, a funereal text written on papyrus and carved on the walls of tombs to help guide the deceased through the afterlife.

Guiding Questions:

What are some ways people have used to communicate in the past and the present? What writing systems have been developed in other cultures at other times? What can tomb paintings tell us about ancient religious beliefs in Egypt?

Learning Objectives

After completing the lessons in this unit, students will be able to:

- Identify certain Egyptian hieroglyphs and recognize their meanings and uses
- Become familiar with aspects of ancient Egyptian culture and religion and their relationship to hieroglyphs
- Explain what a symbol is and use symbols to represent words and thoughts
- Discuss different ways of representing ideas and conveying them to others
- Understand the meaning and purposes of the Egyptian Book of the Dead
- Identify ancient Egyptian gods and goddesses and explain their historical social and religious roles

Suggested Activities

Lesson 1: Decipher the Hieroglyphs
Lesson 2: Make an Egyptian Painting

Lesson 1 Decipher the Hieroglyphs

Background Information for Teacher:

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Subject Areas

Art and Culture
Anthropology
Visual Arts
Foreign Language
Other
History and Social Studies
World History - Ancient World
Literature and Language Arts
World

Time Required

Lesson 1: Two 45-minute classes
Lesson 2: One 45-minute classes

Skills

Observation and description
Analysis of data
Interpretation of written visual information
Written and graphic representation of information
Collaboration

Additional Data

Date Created: 05/21/02

The ancient Egyptians created a form of picture-writing known as hieroglyphs around 3100 BC. Each picture was a symbol representing something they observed in their surroundings. A simple drawing of the sun represented the sun, a drawing of a vulture signified a vulture, a drawing of a rope indicated a rope, and so on. But certain objects, and more particularly ideas, were difficult to represent with a single drawing.

So they resorted to a system of drawing symbols of things that sounded like what they were trying to convey. This was the ancient Egyptian version of a rebus. (A rebus is a representation of a word or phrase that uses pictures that sound like the word or phrase, or its syllables.) An English example of a rebus is a bee and a leaf drawn side by side; when read aloud, they sound like the word "belief." But this approach to writing could become cumbersome and confusing.

Eventually, a system evolved in which a symbol was drawn to represent a specific sound (a consonant). Several symbols were written together to make a word. This is the closest the Egyptians ever came to creating an alphabet. Vowels were not written, but were added (usually eh or ah) by the reader. For this reason, we don't know exactly what ancient Egyptian sounded like.

Hieroglyphs were written vertically (top to bottom) or horizontally (left to right or right to left). To read a horizontal line, one moved toward the faces of the animal symbols. (They all faced in the same direction.) There was no punctuation, and to save space, two small symbols often occupied the space of one larger one. The names of royalty were surrounded with an oval, known as a cartouche. Although there are thousands of symbols, the most commonly occurring are a set of 24, which modern archaeologists use as a working alphabet. They include vowels sounds, although in Egyptian the sound would have been that of a vowel linked with a consonant, such as ahhhhh or uhhhhhh.

The hieroglyphic alphabet can be viewed at the EDSITEment-reviewed website Nova: Pyramids. Print out copies of the list of "letters" for later use.

Hieroglyphs were used at first by a small group of scribes to keep records. Later, they were carved (and then painted) on the walls of tombs and temples, on obelisks, and on sculpture. (Hieroglyph means "sacred carved writing.") They were also written with pen and colored ink on sheets of papyrus. In addition to the glyphs representing sounds (called phonograms), there were a small number that represent entire words or concepts (ideograms).

You can view some ideograms at the EDSITEment-reviewed Metropolitan Museum of Art. Make copies of the ideograms for later use.

Class Activity:

Tell the students to pretend that they have no form of writing. Then ask them how they can send a message to someone far away. Brainstorm until someone suggests that this can be done with pictures. Ask them what sort of pictures they would draw. These would have to be simple things familiar to the message sender and the receiver. Have the students think about their natural environment. What objects are most familiar? Encourage the students to think of trees, grass, stones, birds, squirrels, flowers and anything that is typical of your environment. (If you live in Arizona, symbols might include cactus and snakes.) Make a list on the board of objects that could be used to send a "picture message." Suggest they include human body parts, like hands, feet, eyes, and ears.

Now ask how the following message could be depicted with pictures: "The tree is split in two." One would simply draw a tree broken in two. Explain that they can actually make a written language using these pictures to express more complicated actions, such as: "The silly rabbit lost its carrot and had to go to sleep hungry." Ask for their ideas of how this can be done. Then explain the system of using pictures to represent sounds rather than specific images. For example, a picture of a tree could represent the sound (or letter) b. Using the list you've already written on the board, assign a sound to

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each one. (You might mention that a fun part of this activity is that spelling doesn't matter. It's what you hear that counts.) Make certain you have included the following letter sounds: a, aw, b, d, ee, g (hard), h, i, k (for hard c), l, n, oh, p, r, s, t, th, oo, and uh.

Now that you have your alphabet, work together to figure out how to write the sentence ("The silly rabbit lost its carrot and had to go to sleep hungry.") using the symbols. Write it on the board.

Tell the students about Egyptian hieroglyphs, referring to the information in the Introduction. Point out that the Egyptian system was the same as the one they've just invented themselves. Show them the Egyptian alphabet on the EDSITEment reviewed website Nova: Pyramids.

The students will be happily surprised to see that the Egyptians used symbols similar to those they chose, although some are different, given the differences in environment. (The environment of Egypt is desert/river valley.) Point out that birds (there are three - a chick, a vulture, and an owl, as well as feathers) seem to have been important to the Egyptians. So was water (the symbol for n). Explain that b is a foot (did you have one in your list?) and r is a mouth.

Hand out copies you have previously printed of the Egyptian alphabet to each child as well as blank sheets of paper and pencils. As a group, make up some short sentences. For example, "the moon is big." Ask the students to write a sentence on the paper using the Egyptian letters. Have them share the results. Then do another sentence.

Now explain about ideograms, referring to the information in the Background Information for Teachers. Show them the ideograms on the EDSITEment-reviewed website Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Carefully read aloud what each symbol means, encouraging the students to ask questions. Point out that *shen* and *ankh* (meaning eternal life) and *wedjat* (good health) were especially important in Egyptian culture.

Tell the students that hieroglyphs were often carved on the inner walls of tombs as well as on stone tablets called stellae. Then go the EDSITEment reviewed website Nova: Pyramids.

On the screen that appears, click Programs A-Z, then scroll down and click Egypt's Golden Empire, on the next screen click Egyptian Experience, click enter, on the next screen click hieroglyph translator, and finally click extract one. This is an actual sentence in Egyptian hieroglyphs taken from a stella. With the students carefully observing, scan across from right to left, slowly reading the translation aloud. (Remember, always read toward the faces of the animal symbols.) Remind the students that this is an English translation of an ancient Egyptian message, since the language might appear a bit stilted to them.

Now that the students have an idea of how hieroglyphs were used, tell them they will be Egyptian scribes. Make certain that they have their copies of the Egyptian alphabet. Hand out the copies of the ideograms. Pass out large pieces of white paper and markers or crayons. Each child will write his or her name in hieroglyphs (first and last), followed by an ideogram of his or her choice. Remind them to put a cartouche around their name. Explain that the Egyptian scribes worked very slowly and carefully.

When the project is done, have the students share their hieroglyphs with one another. If time is an issue, you may have the students present their name hieroglyphs and ideograms in small groups while you walk around the room posing questions or giving comments. Then hang them proudly on a bulletin board.

Extending the Lesson

Now that the students have some background about Egyptian writing, art, and religious beliefs, gather a

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collection of colorfully illustrated books about ancient Egyptian culture from your school library. Many stories are currently available which can be read aloud to the children. *The Egyptian Cinderella* by Shirley Climo (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1989) is a favorite with this age group. Older children could do research projects on their favorite gods or goddesses, finding stories about them derived from ancient Egyptian mythology. Material on this subject is available at EDSITEment reviewed websites, including Exploring Ancient World Cultures, Odyssey Online, and Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Selected EDSITEment Websites

- Center for Liberal Arts
  - Programs A-Z
- Exploring Ancient World Cultures
  - Index of Internet Resources
  - Papyrus
  - Book of the Dead
- Metropolitan Museum of Art
  - Frequently Used Hieroglyphs
  - Book of the Dead
- Nova: Pyramids
  - Hieroglyph Message and Alphabet

Other Information

Standards Alignment

1. ACTFL-2.1

   Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied more

2. ACTFL-3.1

   Reinforce and further knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language more

3. ACTFL-4.1

   Demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and one's own more

4. ACTFL-4.2

   Demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and one's own more

5. NAES-VisArts(K-4) 1

   Understanding context by recognizing the role of theatre, film, television, and electronic media in daily life

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6. NAES-VisArts(K-4) 3

   Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

7. NAES-VisArts(K-4) 4

   Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

8. NAES-VisArts(K-4) 5

   Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

9. NCSS-1

   Culture and cultural diversity. more

10. NCSS-2

    Time, continuity, and change. The ways human beings view themselves in and over time. more

11. NCSS-3

    People, places, and environments. more

12. NCTE/IRA-1

    Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works. more

13. NCTE/IRA-12

    Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information). more

14. NCTE/IRA-3

    Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. more

15. NCTE/IRA-4

    Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. more

16. NCTE/IRA-9

    Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

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Egyptian Symbols and Figures: Scroll Paintings

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GRADES K-2

Introduction

This lesson introduces students to the writing, art, and religious beliefs of ancient Egypt through hieroglyphs, one of the oldest writing systems in the world, and through tomb paintings. Hieroglyphs consist of pictures of familiar objects that represent sounds. They were used in ancient Egypt from about 3100 BC to 400 CE.

In the first part of this lesson, the class creates a pictorial alphabet of its own and then learns and uses the symbols of the Egyptian hieroglyphic alphabet. In the second part of the lesson, students identify and represent in their own drawings figures from the Book of the Dead, a funereal text written on papyrus and carved on the walls of tombs to help guide the deceased through the afterlife.

Book of the Dead
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Guiding Questions:

What are some ways people have used to communicate in the past and the present? What writing systems have been developed in other cultures at other times? What can tomb paintings tell us about ancient religious beliefs in Egypt?

Learning Objectives

After completing the lessons in this unit, students will be able to:

- Identify certain Egyptian hieroglyphs and recognize their meanings and uses
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- Explain what a symbol is and use symbols to represent words and thoughts
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Other
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Skills

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Analysis of data
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Written and graphic representation of information
Collaboration

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Suggested Activities

Lesson 1: Decipher the Hieroglyphs
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Lesson 2 Make an Egyptian Painting

The ancient Egyptians drew (and carved) figures of gods and goddesses, people, animals, and everyday objects on tomb and temple walls, stellae, obelisks, and papyrus. They believed in the magical quality of

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these figures. For example, they believed that after a body was placed in a tomb and the doors were sealed, the figures on the walls (and even models of figures made of clay) would come alive to serve the deceased in the afterlife. For this reason, pharaohs and nobles had plenty of pictures (and figures) of servants to wait on them for all eternity!

Sacred Texts were placed in the tombs of the Egyptian elite to guide the soul of the deceased through various obstacles as it journeyed between this world and the next. These texts included special words and phrases (known as spells) that, if uttered at particular times and places, enabled the soul to arrive at the edge of the land of the dead. During the Old Kingdom (the earliest period of dynastic Egyptian history, dating from the third millennium BC), these writings were carved onto the walls of the pyramids of the pharaohs and their queens. The texts were accompanied by illustrations of the soul's perilous journey and eventual arrival in the land of the dead. (These are known as the Pyramid Texts.)

During the Middle Kingdom (beginning in 2055 BC), passages and drawings from the Pyramid Texts were painted directly onto the wooden coffins of wealthy nobles and Egyptian royalty. (They are known as the Coffin Texts.) During the New Kingdom (1550-1069 BC), sacred funereal texts (and illustrations) were painted on papyrus scrolls. These were in large part derived from the earlier texts and are referred to as individual versions of The Book of the Dead. A scroll was rolled up and placed in a special container in the coffin beside the body. In addition to the scrolls, many pharaohs who were buried in the Valley of the Kings had copies of The Book of the Dead carved and painted on the walls and ceilings of their tombs.

An important part of The Book of the Dead was a pictorial description of the drama that would supposedly unfold when the soul arrived in the land of the dead. The soul (which resembled the deceased person) was first greeted by Osiris, the Egyptian god of the dead, who posed a number of questions about the quality of the person's life on earth. (The appropriate answers were conveniently written above the drawings for easy reference.) Then Anubis, the jackal-headed god of mummies, placed the heart of the deceased on a scale. If it balanced with a feather (this symbolized truth and goodness), the soul would go on to enjoy a very pleasant afterlife. But if the heart was heavier than a feather, a monster named Ammut (part hippo, part lion, and part crocodile) was waiting to gobble it (the soul) up! Thoth, the ibis-headed god of scribes, stood by the scales, ready to write down the verdict, while 42 other gods sat in judgment. Overseeing the ceremony was Ma'at, the goddess of truth. (She's easy to spot - she has a feather on her head!) Because the ancient Egyptians believed in magic, they assumed that everything depicted in the paintings of the Book of the Dead would actually occur once the tomb was sealed.

Go to the EDSITEment reviewed website Metropolitan Museum. This is a fragment from The Book of the Dead found in a tomb dating from about 1000 BC. Also you can view larger version of the graphic, without the text. Print copies of the graphic for your students.

Class Activity:

Explain to the students about the Book of the Dead, referring to information in the Introduction. Then go to the Metropolitan Museum. Read aloud the description of the Book of the Dead to the students. Point out the figures of the soul and the various gods in the image as you come across them in the text.

Go to the EDSITEment-reviewed website Exploring Ancient World Cultures and click on the icon for Ancient Egypt. Then click on Images and scroll down to Detroit Institute of Arts and click "Papyrus of Nes-min," then on Click for Larger Version.This is a papyrus fragment found in a tomb dating from 300 BC. Read the description aloud. Have the students identify the various figures in the picture.

Now navigate back to the Images page of Ancient Egypt.Scroll down to the Oriental Institute, then click on Book of the Dead. On the screen that comes up, click on the picture to enlarge it. This is another fragment of the Book of the Dead dating from around 300 BC. Read the description with the students.

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Discuss with the students what they've learned about the picture story of The Book of the Dead. Then hand out the copies of the graphic you printed from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Talk about the various figures, noting the special attributes of each one. Notice that some have animal heads or bodies, others don't. The falcon at the top is Horus, son of Osiris and protector of the living pharaoh. This time Thoth appears as a baboon. (The Egyptian gods were often depicted in more than one way.) You might also want to display colored pictures of the Egyptian deities (Anubis, Osiris, Horus, Ma'at, and Thoth) found in books in your school library. Have each student choose a favorite figure from the Book of the Dead.

Hand out large pieces of paper and markers or crayons. Have the students draw their figures. Those who are ambitious might even try to write the name of the figure in hieroglyphs. When the drawings are finished, have each student share his or hers with the class, explaining who it is and what his or her special functions might be. Later, hang the figures near the exhibit of hieroglyphs for all to enjoy.

Extending the Lesson

Now that the students have some background about Egyptian writing, art, and religious beliefs, gather a collection of colorfully illustrated books about ancient Egyptian culture from your school library. Many stories are currently available which can be read aloud to the children. *The Egyptian Cinderella* by Shirley Climo (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1989) is a favorite with this age group. Older children could do research projects on their favorite gods or goddesses, finding stories about them derived from ancient Egyptian mythology. Material on this subject is available at EDSITEment reviewed websites, including Exploring Ancient World Cultures, Odyssey Online, and Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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